25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7
Karenni
Chin AP5

K 101 [197] 131 ● 105 K [524]

349. KAREN HOOP-GAME.

The Karenni, or "Red Karéns," have a language of Karén structure, but the people recall the truculent Kachín much more than the mild Karén. They inhabit a plateau about half the size of Wales, lying between the northern limit of the White Karéns and the southern limit of Shans and Kachins. The *Karenni* are darker-skinned than the Karéns. They use red and black colours in their clothing; the men wear short pants, sleeveless Shan jackets, and a red *gaung-baung*. The women wear a black cloth, somewhat after the manner of the Siamese women; they do most of the labour, even the tilling of the rice-fields, which are on the Shan model; but *taungya* is practised also. They brew a liquor from millet-corn, which the men always carry in their gourd. The villages are permanent, situated on points of vantage, and are stockaded. Feuds between villages are chronic and form the chief concern of the male population. Such of the Karenni as settle in the lowlands adopt the Shan civilisation and dress.

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The Chins are believed by some to represent the stock from which the Burman tribes originated, and to have descended into the valley of the Irawadi from the plateau of Tibet, with the inhabitants of which the Burmans and Chins possess linguistic affinities not shared by other races of the Peninsula. The Chins are the hill-people of the mountains west of the Irawadi and its great tributary the Chindwin. The tribes are many and diverse. Towards the south and on the borders of the plains they are Burmanised in a great measure, and have dropped their primitive characteristics, notably their language. They call themselves Ashō. The black tattooing of the women's faces, which is the most distinctive of

K [286]

349. KAREN WOMAN WEAVING.

21: Credner--277 K-5 (1927-1929) 1935 AO1 Thailand AD1
Kha AM7
Karen AP7
Lawa AO5

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563 The migration legends of the Ka tribes, as they have been
Kh taken down by A. Lagreze in Muang Noea east of Luang Prabang (see
105 note, page 269), are particularly interesting. According to them, the Ka tell of extensive migrations by their forefathers from the north towards the south. They believe themselves to be of the same origin as the Lao. They are supposed at one time to have owned the valleys in which the latter are today settled, and even before them another type of people is supposed to have been lived in their present habitat, whom they call 'pu giot.' They themselves, so the legends go, came from the north in several migrations. The legendary names of the former districts of settlement are still familiar to them today. In the "Ven" district they are supposed to have seen the sun for the first time. There, however, it was still as small as a rice kernel. It was not until they got to the "Toe" district that they obtained a view of the constellation of the day in full size, until they moved into their present habitat, Noea, on their last migration.

These migration legends are of very great interest. Similar ones, but yet much more magnificent, have been reported about the Miao by Savina. The Miao, after all, are still today engaged in migrating south. They also make it probable that the Ka peoples did actually immigrate at one time from the north. The fact that they have assimilated parts of an older population becomes apparent from their racial type which clearly permits one to recognize admixture of more primitive elements. Whether they were already bearers of an Austro-Asian language during their immigration, or whether they only took it over in their present habitat, must be left open so long as no detailed linguistic research is available.

2. The Lava and Karen in the Northwest

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563 While the two splinter groups of the Ka peoples from the
● Ka northeast, that have been described, belong to the Austro-Asian lan-
L
105 guage group, this applies only to the Lava in the northwestern part of
● the mountain upland. The Karen, on the other hand, quite certainly should be included in the Siamo-Chinese group of the Indochinese language family, that is to say, the family that is more recent in Southeast Asia.

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563 an important part in their life. Their environment is a flat plateau
L district situated at an altitude of about 900 meters, with only little
105 relief and wide, flat valley passes which facilitate the construction of irrigated rice paddies. The extra income through the forging for which they obtained the ore in small mining pits--nowadays they work pig iron bought on the markets--made it possible for them to acquire the buffaloes and cows necessary for agriculture with a plow, and today they also breed these animals. In this manner they were able to maintain themselves to this day in an exceptional way of life dominated by the occurrence of iron ore, their traditional making of wrought iron, and the nature of their habitat. On the other hand, their cousins in the plains were much less resistant to assimilation by the Lao.

According to statements by people who know the country well, among the leading Lao of today, the Lao settling in the valleys of northwestern Siam are actually only supposed to be Lao-speaking Lava to a great extent. As a result the following hypothesis might be correct: Even before the arrival of the Lao in the north of Siam, there existed two ways of life among the proto-population, the Lava. At that time already there existed in the plains farmers with plow who worked their irrigated fields with the help of large domestic animals, buffalo and cattle. They had, therefore, the same economic form as the Mon and Khmer settled in the south, but also the same way of life as the Thai-Lao coming in later from the north. In addition there also existed a population stratum of Lava along the slopes of the mountains who cultivated mountain rice with the digging stick. When the Lao assimilated, only the Lava's digging stick type of cultivation was preserved in remnants in the mountains. The plow agriculture of the Bo Luang plateau represents an exceptional case set apart by the wrought iron, in addition to this.

The Karen

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563 The Karen tribes are more recent than the Lava on Siamese
K soil. Their main area of distribution lies west of the Mae Khong in
● 105 the southern Shan States, in the district of Karenni, and from there it

21: Credner--280 K-5 (1927-1929) 1935 AO1 Thailand AO1
Karen AP7

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extends all the way to the Burmese coastal plain into which they have immigrated only in the course of the last few centuries. The Karen are represented in Indochina in three groups, the Sgau-Karen, the Puo-Karen, and the Bue-Karen. In Siam the Red Karen, who extend from Karenni over across the Mae Khong into the extreme northwest of the country, belong to the Bue. [161] They appear north and west of Maehongson. South of the line running from Maehongson to Chiangmai the white Karen are settled, who belong to the group of the Puo-Karen. They extend into Siam all the way to the Mae Klong mountain upland north of Kanchanaburi, and everywhere there they are offshoots of the main mass of their tribe settled in Burma. On Siamese soil, thus, the Karen are only the most easterly extension of a popular wave that went further southward in the west between the Mae Khong and the Irrawaddy.

Somatically the Karen are closer to the Tibeto-Burmese tribes than to the remaining peoples of the Siamo-Chinese language group. Among the men especially the frequent occurrence of a curved nose with narrow bridge is a phenomenon which is also very frequent among the Tibeto-Burmese tribes of Yünnan, particularly among the Lissu, The Karen are distinguished from the Thai, and especially from the mountain peoples of the Miao and Yao, by particularly little development of the Mongolian eye. At the same time they nevertheless belong to the great racial group of the Mongoloids. They have smooth, black hair as well as greatly projecting cheek bones. Among the newly born the Mongolian spot is also developed, which as elsewhere also disappears in the third or fourth year of life (1).

1. A. Kerr, "Ethnologic Notes," Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. 18 (Bangkok, 1924).

Furthermore, their very light complexion is striking as a clear characteristic distinguishing them from the Austro-Asian peoples. On the clothed portions of their body they are bright yellow, and, indeed, some are even almost white (2). Thus one is almost tempted to say,

2. J. P. Andersen, "Some Notes about the Karens in Siam," Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Bangkok, 1922), p. 52.

21: Credner--281 K-5 (1927-1929) 1935 AO1 Thailand AO1
Karen AP7

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563 in accordance with the time of their immigration they occupy an
K intermediate position between the older Austro-Asians in Indochina
105 and the younger Siamo-Chinese immigrants, the Thai.

A number of the Karen tribes in Burma have held on to their traditional tribal costumes with great perseverance up to this day. The same also applies, on the whole, to the Karen in Siam. Here, especially among the white Karen, we encounter a national costume which has been falsified very little and has kept much of the original. To be sure, this applies only to the women. Among the men one can only rarely still see the shirt-like coat that reaches down to the knees. Quite universally they wear the wide trousers that reach down to the calves and the long-sleeved jacket of the Shan.

The women, on the other hand, like to preserve their old costume. The latter varies for married and unmarried women. The girls wear a shirt made of rough cotton material, long, reaching down almost to the ankles, sewn up on all sides, and having only a slit for the head. The women, on the other hand, wear a kind of shirt blouse made of dark blue cotton material. This has brown and red patterns woven through it which are especially brought out further by white plant seeds (seeds of the Colix lachryma, Job's tears) in a very effective manner. On the whole the clothing of these white Karen (Plate 13, Illustration 20) gives the impression of quite a highly developed farming culture. The case is different with the Red Karen. They expend far less care on their clothing, just as, on the whole, they are distinguished from the white Karen by almost inconceivable dirt. The clothing, often very ragged, consists of a sarong that reaches only as far as the knees in the case of the women, and a wide cloth draped around the shoulders which covers the upper part of the body. Their ornamentation is particularly characteristic: reed rings in great numbers, placed around the neck, and whole bundles of such rings, 20 to 30 in number, which they wear above the calf of the leg.

The Karen, as regards their way of life, again present very interesting [162] phenomena. Red and white Karen may be found both as plow farmers with permanent, irrigated fields and sedentary villages, and also as genuine hoe farmers with cleared fields and

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temporary settlements. In between these there are all and any conceivable transitions, with the cultivation of rice practiced partly in irrigated fields and partly in forest clearings. The physiographical peculiarity of the living area apparently determines the method of cultivation that is applied. In the mountain upland between Chiangmai and Maehongson two types can be observed. The first is the pure digging stick cultivation of mountain rice. As in the case of the forest peoples of the northeast, the Tin and Kamuk, glassy glutinous rice is cultivated exclusively. Clearing and tilling proceed almost exactly in the same manner as among these forest peoples. As there, the cleared fields are here also tilled mostly for just one year and after that become victim to the invading Eupatorium. How such fields look at that time, during the second or third year, at the time of the weeds' flowering, is illustrated by our picture, Plate 11, Illustration 17 which was photographed at the end of December. The little village settlements that are located along the mountain slopes, mostly far away from the caravan paths and below an altitude of 1,000 meters, are in general temporary in this form of economy, and they are easily shifted when more favorable places for beginning new clearings have been found, or when the spirits of the old places have shown themselves as hostile.

This way of life of the pure digging stick culture also predominates among the Karen of the Mae Klong mountain upland in western Siam. From their habitat, Plate 15, Illustration 27 gives a beautiful example of the appearance of their cleared fields after the rice harvest had been completed, while Plate 14, Illustration 25 gives us a picture of the tool employed in the digging stick culture. In addition to the digging stick with its iron edge, another knife-like iron tool with a long handle is used for clearing away the weeds, and for transporting the rice from the field to the village and there is a great variety of beautifully braided baskets for storing the rice in the village for consumption.

Now, whenever enlargements of the valley are located in the forested mountain upland, not only in the deeply sunk main valleys where they then have attracted mostly the Lao, but also in higher locations in the smaller valleys, then it is easy to set up irrigated rice

21: Credner--283 K-5 (1927-1929) 1935 AO1 Thailand AO1
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culture by means of water from the brooks, and this opportunity is exploited by the Karen. At the same, one will rarely find their settlements in these small plains. They are situated farther away, frequently even at a considerable distance from the irrigated rice paddies, in the woodlands. The small rice paddy patches mostly do not suffice as basic sustenance for the village. Instead, cleared fields must be added, and now the interesting phenomenon appears that the settlements are still not permanent even though in a certain sense they are bound to the area by the permanent fields. On the contrary, the people still give up their settlements and rebuild elsewhere with great facility whenever any kind of reason should demand it. The villages are very different in size, and the same applies to the houses, constructed according to the amount of property and the number in the family. Low pile structures, the houses are constructed almost entirely of bamboo. There are no fruit trees plantings or any kind of garden cultivation. This is not necessarily always the case. Up to an altitude of 900 meters I encountered banana shrubs in Karen settlements, but garden cultivation nevertheless is much less common among the forest peoples, very much in contrast to the peoples of the plains among whom orchard and garden plantings play an important role.

[163] If one goes from our mountain upland across the Mae Nam Khong into the region of the southern Shan States, one enters districts of an entirely different morphological character. Here extensive plains are situated at levels in altitude 700 to 1,200 meters, and on these surfaces of the Shan plateau Red Karen are settled again. They are completely adapted to irrigated rice cultivation. Their large villages have also become sedentary now. This becomes apparent from the very ancient sacred trees which stand along the edges of the villages, of which a group usually constitutes the seat of the tutelary spirit of that particular village.

The Karen therefore represent a cultural level which permits them either to decide on digging stick culture or plow culture, all depending upon the natural conditions of their habitat. The tendency even to shift their settlements when they have already become sedentary as to part of the production; the little care that they expend upon the accessory cultivation, orchard and garden culture. Finally, the entirety of the religious conceptions, the absence of forms of higher

21: Credner--284 K-5 (1927-1929) 1935 AO1 Thailand AO1
Karen AP7

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563 social structures and public organization--all these, nevertheless,
K lead one to the conjecture that the Karen have scarcely grown out of
105 the cultural level of pure 'hoe culture' peoples, and that they have only recently adopted the cultural form of plow agriculture.

The religious conceptions of the Karen correspond completely to those of the remaining primitive peoples of Southeast Asia, and also of the other large areas of distribution of this form of life. To them, too, nature presents itself as animated by spirits which man must attempt to propitiate. The art of predicting the future from the bleeding of sacrificed animals, especially hens, is employed before every action of any importance at all. If the matter has turned out well, brandy is poured over the sacrifice. The harvest thanksgiving festival is the center of the year's festivities. On this occasion an offering is brought before the small temple of the village spirit who is responsible for the result of the harvest. A number of rods similar to our maypoles, have been erected there near the temple, as well as small offering tables bent into the form of boats. All this is in an area situated outside the village under old trees, according to the greater or lesser importance of the settlement, and belongs to each Karen village. When the rice is brought in at harvest time, then they construct their little storage places for rice (Plate 14, Illustration 26) underneath the floor. These are small structures that give the impression of toys. A container is constructed from split bamboo sticks lined with banana leaves, and then filled with rice paddy earth. Into this earth they stick, in addition to small models of the rice cultivating tools, a bow that is stretched and pointed upward against all evil powers that might dare to touch the rice provisions.

A further trait of character is also peculiar to the Karen and can be seen in the district; namely, their preference for brilliantly-colored blossoming shrubs. Thus they keep shrubs of luminous red cockscomb interspersed with rice. It may be that in this peculiarity we have an echo of an ancient imaginary world that has been lost and which we encountered among the Semang, in which flowers are the seat of light elf-like creatures. The Karen also have their migration myths just like the Ka peoples and critical investigation of these still remains to be carried out.

21: Credner K-5 (1927-1929) 1935
(p. 292b) [opp. p. 169]
Karen AP7
AO1 Thailand A01
Table 14
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Western Siam, Tools of the Digging Stick Culture.

Abb. 25 Digging stick with iron spade, to the right of it tools for beating down the weeds and wooden rice stamper, to the left the jungle knife and a shovel for spreading rice. Photograph: W. Credner, December 17, 1927.

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Western Siam. Charms Used for Protection Against Spirits among the White Karen.

Abb. 26.

Under the floor of the little rice storehouse a small structure has been built of bamboo and filled with rice paddy earth. In this is stuck a bow, stretched against all evil spirits that might dare approach the rice. Photograph: W. Credner, December 17, 1927.

113, 105 Karen AP7

/For general information on the Karen (Karien) of Thailand see 23: Graham, AOl Thailand, category 116, pp. 174-177./